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DEPARTMENT OF VISITING NURSING AND SOCIAL WELFARE



IN CHARGE OF

EDNA L. FOLEY, R.N.

[To keep this department up-to-date and helpfully interesting, nurses in social work of every description and superintendents of district nursing associations are asked to put the address of its editor—104 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago—on their mailing files for items, clippings, and annual reports.]

INFANT WELFARE WORK IN THE UNITED STATES

By MINNIE H. AHRENS

WOMEN do not know instinctively how to take care of babies. This is proven by mortality statistics. The education of the mother in the care of herself and infant will do more to reduce infant mortality than any other measure. When should this instruction begin? The earlier the better: it should not be put off until the birth of the infant, but should be given as early in pregnancy as possible. Visiting nurse associations and organizations doing infant welfare work in the past have done a certain amount of prenatal work, instructing such mothers as came under their care. With the realization of the importance of this work has developed a more systematic plan of registering the mothers as early as possible in pregnancy and regularly visiting them in their homes, to supervise and instruct until the birth of the infant.

The nurse doing prenatal work may do much to teach the mother the importance of having a physician attend her during delivery and the evils of employing a midwife. The instruction should be made simple and comprehensive. Many of the mothers are inclined to think there is no necessity for special care during the period of pregnancy. The expectant mother should be taught the importance of fresh air, drinking plenty of water, exercise in the open air, proper clothing, and a simple diet, of avoiding fried or heavy foods. The nurse may advise a generous diet of cereals, milk, cocoa, and vegetables. In cases where mothers are not able to obtain the proper nourishment, the nurse should ask aid from such agencies as will see that it is supplied. Instruction as to care of the kidneys and bowels is of the greatest importance. If any abnormal symptom exists, medical care should be provided. The expectant mother

should be taught the importance of breast feeding and of regularity of feeding, as well as all matters pertaining to infant life and hygiene. There is no question but that careful and regular prenatal instruction prevents many infants being artificially fed and many mothers being invalids.

Careful records should be kept of the social history and physical condition during pregnancy, and, after the infant is born, the condition at birth, its weight, and the gain or loss from week to week should be recorded; accurate records should be kept by the nurse of her visits and work in the home; such data will be valuable in the supervision of both mother and infant. Nurses often consider time spent doing clerical work wasted; this is a mistake, for if statistics of any value are to be obtained, accurate records are necessary.

The various visiting nurse associations do a certain amount of prenatal work in conjunction with their obstetrical cases. The following organizations report definite organized effort to give prenatal care, there may be other organizations of which the writer does not know: The Caroline Rest and School for Mothers; St. Louis Visiting Nurse Association; The Babies' Dispensary Guild, Hamilton, Ont., Canada; The Babies' Milk Fund Association, Louisville, Ky.; The Committee on Infant Social Service of the Women's Municipal League of Boston; The Health Department, Richmond, Va.; The Infant Welfare Society of Chicago; Maryland Association for Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality; Infant Welfare Association, New Haven, Conn.; The New York Milk Committee, New York City.

ITEMS

MARYLAND.—Nellie Casey, R.N., has resigned her position in Frederick to accept a similar one in Hagerstown, although the latter means pioneer work in organizing local tuberculosis work, which she did so well in Frederick. Miss Casey was appointed by Governor Goldsborough delegate to represent Maryland at the Southern Sociological Congress.

CALIFORNIA.—The ninth annual report of the Good Cheer Club of San Jose is an all too brief account of the good work accomplished in the past year by its visiting nurse, Grace Gallagher, R.N., Missouri, who made over 900 nursing calls in the homes of her patients. The amount of relief given would indicate that the club stood for other good things beside visiting nursing, and was living up to its very suggestive and happily-selected name.